

Thomas Jefferson to John Randolph, Jr., December 1, 1803, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO JOHN RANDOLPH J. MSS.

Washington, Dec. 1, 03.

Dear Sir, —The explanation in your letter of yesterday was quite unnecessary to me. I have had too satisfactory proofs of your friendly regard, to be disposed to suspect anything of a contrary aspect. I understood perfectly the expressions stated in the newspaper to which you allude, to mean, that “tho' the proposition came from the *republican quarter* of the House, yet you should not concur with it.” I am aware that in parts of the Union, & even with persons to whom Mr. Eppes and Mr. Randolph are unknown, & myself little known, it will be presumed from their connection, that what comes from them comes from me. No men on earth are more independent in their sentiments than they are, nor any one less disposed than I am to influence the opinions of others. We rarely speak of politics, or of the proceedings of the House, but merely historically, and I carefully avoid expressing an opinion on them, in their presence, that we may all be at our ease. With other members, I have believed that more unreserved communications would be advantageous to the public. This has been, perhaps, prevented by mutual delicacy. I have been afraid to express opinions unasked, lest I should be suspected of wishing to direct the legislative action of members. They have avoided asking communications from me, probably, lest they should be suspected of wishing to fish out executive secrets. I see too many proofs of the imperfection of human reason, to entertain wonder or intolerance at any difference of opinion on any subject; and acquiesce in that difference as easily as on

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a difference of feature or form; experience having long taught me the reasonableness of mutual sacrifices of opinion among those who are to act together for any common object, and the expediency of doing what good we can, when we cannot do all we would wish.

Accept my friendly salutations, and assurances of great esteem & respect.